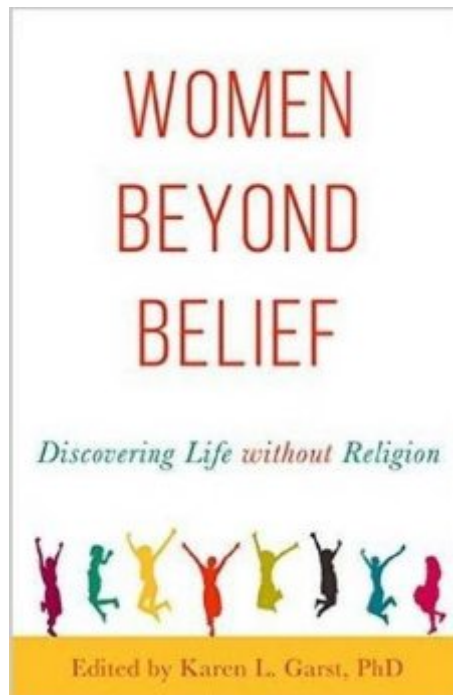


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Women Beyond Belief: Discovering Life Without Religion



Synopsis

Women have made great strides toward equal rights over the past hundred years, especially in the West. But when considering the ongoing fight over reproductive rights and equal pay¹⁵¹;and the prevalence of sexual violence and domestic abuse¹⁵¹;it is clear that a significant gap still exists. With scripture often cited as justification for the marginalization of women, it is time to acknowledge that one of the final barriers to full equality for women is religion. Much has been written about the great strides humankind has made in knocking down many long-held religious beliefs, whether related to the age of the earth or the origin of the species. But religion's negative impact on women has been less studied and discussed. This book is a step toward changing that. Twenty-two women from a variety of backgrounds and Judeo-Christian traditions share their personal stories about how they came to abandon organized religion, and how they discovered life after moving away from religious and supernatural beliefs. Their words serve both as a celebration of all who have taken similar steps under the weight of thousands of years of religious history¹⁵¹;and as a source of inspiration for those individuals, especially women, who have deep doubts about their own belief traditions but who don't yet know how to embrace life without falling back on religion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Karen Garst's WOMEN BEYOND BELIEF is a collection of twenty-two women's amazing journey from a life of religion to a life without religion. They may have battled, they may have been beaten; but despite the odds, they have survived. They come from all walks of life and from a great diversity of religious backgrounds. Yet they all have come to the conclusion that religion makes women

second class citizens and they want none of that. I highly recommend this book to any woman who questions why religion finds her inferior to men, who questions just exactly why a loving god would exact such terrible retributions on people he created - in his image, and who think there must be a better path to follow than the one they were indoctrinated into in their childhood.

I was raised in a secular household and attended Sunday School because it was one of the few activities available for a child in a small town. I'm not exactly sure why, but none of the teachings resonated with me so I never embraced Christianity and, thankfully, I was never coerced into doing so. When I read Dr. Garst's book, I was riveted by the experiences the women in her book encountered with religion. Their compelling stories were incredibly moving and I found myself wanting to read one after another. I applaud their courage to share their journeys and I wish them a truly extraordinary life without religion!

Over the past decade, the number of publications documenting the perspectives of male non-believers has skyrocketed, often overshadowing appraisals of the lived experiences of women nonbelievers. Karen Garst's *Women Beyond Belief* is an insightful addition to the small but growing body of work on women who are questioning organized religion. These essays underscore why the process is more onerous for women, who must negotiate the sexist discrimination, respectability politics, and stifling norms of gender and sexuality imposed by religious dogma and tradition. Providing rich testimony from a variety of world views and walks of life, *Women Beyond Belief* is a refreshing snapshot of the cultural and social issues that inform women's transition to secularism and nonbelief.

• There are few things more valuable than sharing each other's stories. We learn from others; we gain compassion and understanding of not just them, but also of ourselves. This book invites us into the hearts and worlds of women who have made the life-changing journey from believer to nonbeliever. Each story is unique, filled with anguish, brilliance, pain, and joy, not unlike having a child. And, yet, each story is the same. Each woman was in a very real sense reborn as they shed the cocoon of their old religion for the wings to take flight into fresh air. *Women Beyond Belief* is a testimony to the inner call for truth and the strength of these women to find it for themselves. I found them awe-inspiring.

• Rebecca Hale, President of the American Humanist Association and cofounder of EvolveFISH.com and the Freethinkers of Colorado Springs

When women break free from closed religious groups and Iron Age gender scripts, all manner of daring thoughts and adventures become possible. Sometimes funny, sometimes fierce, often sad and exuberant in turn these essays invite us along on twenty-two journeys into and out of religion many from the vantage of a woman who at some point in her life tried to live by a biblical script and then discovered something better. As atheists and freethinkers congregate around shared values and experiences, brave intelligent voices like these will help ensure that the unique experience of women shapes the secular spiritual communities of the future.

Valerie Tarico, psychologist and author of *Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light* and *Deas and Other Imaginings*

Nothing is as powerful as the stories we tell about our own lives. No teacher, no scientist, no specialist in a certain subject area can truly understand and convey the information about a person's life as the person herself. In this book, 22 women tell their stories of when and how they left religion behind. This is not about religion bashing. It is about women who found that religion no longer (or never) served them and as a matter of fact held them back, when really, they needed to advance. I cried at some of the stories, smiled at others, but I was inspired by all. Thank you, Karen, for giving women a platform. This book is so valuable and needed to be written!

I purchased this book because I know an author of one of the essays, Ruth Marimo. I have watched her journey from Christian believer to atheist and have read her other books. I found this book fascinating because of the very personal writings of these women. Their journeys were sometimes heartbreaking because of the reactions of their families and friends. But none of them regret making the decisions they did. While I have moved from Christianity to some sort of a belief in a higher power, I haven't made the leap to atheism. I don't know that I ever will, but I am glad that atheists are becoming more vocal and that there are organizations where they find acceptance. One issue I have with religion, and especially religion in America is that we put so much emphasis on politics and religion. The idea that God favors us because we are a "Christian" nation is appalling. This reasoning excuses our extermination of indigenous people, our treatment of slaves and women. This issue is addressed by many of the authors. The idea of living each day to the best of our ability, taking care of our earth and treating others as we want to be treated should be - but in practice are not - what are supposed to be basic tenets of most religions. The authors in the book subscribe to this belief and practice it much better than many believers. I learned much from this book, and I plan on reading it more than once. This is well worth purchasing and is very thought provoking.

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